

at the WIV have a right and obligation to determine whether any of our research funding was diverted to secret Chinese military projects at the WIV.

Today's revelations just scratch the surface of what is still hidden about COVID-19's origin in China. Any credible investigation into the origin of COVID-19 demands complete, transparent access to the research labs in Wuhan, including their facilities, samples, personnel, and records.

As the world continues to battle this pandemic—and as WHO investigators begin their work, after more than a year of delays—the virus's origin remains uncertain. The United States will continue to do everything it can to support a credible and thorough investigation, including by continuing to demand transparency on the part of Chinese authorities.

MARCH 1, 2021.

Hon. JOSEPH R. BIDEN, JR.,
President of the United States,
Washington, DC.

DEAR PRESIDENT BIDEN: The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a significant toll on American life as well as the U.S. economy. Test kits, antibody therapies, and vaccine development have occurred in record time due to Operation Warp Speed and the ingenuity of the private sector. However, the investigation into the origins of the pandemic are not complete. Without this knowledge, it will be difficult to prevent a future, similar pandemic. I urge you to use your leadership to ensure investigations by the World Health Organization (WHO) are free from conflicts of interest.

Concerns have been raised about the lack of transparency of the events that took place at the time the outbreak started in Wuhan, China. In addition, concerns have been raised regarding the manner in which World Health Organization investigators were chosen to study the outbreak and some of the conflicts of interest that exist in those investigators.

Following the 2014 breakdown of security measures that resulted in cross contamination with a dangerous bird flu strain and the accidental mailing of live anthrax spores from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to other labs, Tom Frieden, the director of the CDC under president Obama testified "We also need to encourage a culture of openness and effective reporting of past or future incidents—since a key aspect of effective response is to support rapid reporting of problems."

On February 13, 2021, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said, "We have deep concerns about the way in which the early findings of the COVID-19 investigation were communicated and questions about the process used to reach them. It is imperative that this report be independent, with expert findings free from intervention or alteration by the Chinese government."

Transparency is an issue upon which we can agree. In light of that, I respectfully request you use your leadership to ensure the ongoing investigation of the COVID-19 pandemic origin be free from conflict of interest. WHO should be required to have independent investigators to conduct this study. WHO should not include researchers with conflicts of interest or with a lack of experience in forensic investigation. We owe this to the over 500,000 Americans who have died from this disease, to their families, and to future Americans who face possible pandemics.

Sincerely,

MARSHA BLACKBURN,
U.S. Senator.

MAY 24, 2021.

Hon. JOSEPH R. BIDEN, JR.,
President of the United States,
Washington, DC.

DEAR PRESIDENT BIDEN: I write to follow-up on my March 1, 2021 letter with lingering concerns about the validity of the World Health Organization's (WHO) investigation into the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prior reports appear to confirm that the WHO had "little power to conduct a thorough, impartial examination." On May 13, 2021, in a letter published in *Science*, a group of 19 prominent scientists called for a deeper investigation of the two primary hypotheses: 1) the virus began to spread after jumping from infected animals to humans; and 2) the virus was accidentally released from China's Wuhan Institute of Virology and began spreading in the human population.

Among other issues, these scientists call into question the China-WHO joint study's consideration of the two main hypotheses stating, "Only 4 of the 313 pages of the report and its annexes addressed the possibility of a laboratory accident." This fact is deeply concerning in light of recent media reports that, "[t]hree researchers from China's Wuhan Institute of Virology became sick enough in November 2019 that they sought hospital care."

In light of these reports and my continued concerns, please respond, in writing, to the following questions:

1. According to reports, the WHO asked the U.S. government to recommend three experts for the China-WHO joint investigation team. Although they were not ultimately selected, another U.S. scientist was selected for the team.

a. Please name the three scientists recommended by the U.S., and articulate the WHO's reasoning for not choosing these individuals.

2. Beijing has refused to share critical raw data on the initial cases of COVID-19 in China. Has Beijing provided the U.S. with that data? If not, please explain why.

3. The China-WHO joint investigation stated that they "lacked expertise and access to investigate a potential lab leak." What will the administration do to insure that competent, impartial experts are involved in future investigations?

4. WHO spokesman Tarik Jasarevic said the organization was not mandated to do a forensic audit. Why was this the case? Will your administration insist on a fulsome forensic audit for future outbreaks?

I request the courtesy of a reply by June 14, 2021.

Sincerely,

MARSHA BLACKBURN,
U.S. Senator.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. I yield the floor.
The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

FOR THE PEOPLE ACT OF 2021

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I would like to speak for a moment about S. 1.

This bill says that politicians and unelected bureaucrats who spend their entire careers in the same few square miles of Washington, DC, know how to run Nebraska's elections better than Nebraskans. I was glad to see the senior Senator from West Virginia come out against S. 1 and provide some much-needed honesty about what some Democrats' true intentions are with this bill.

I think he summed up this issue well when he wrote in his op-ed: "Today's

debate about how to best protect our right to vote and to hold elections, however, is not about finding common ground, but seeking partisan advantage."

As I said at the Rules Committee's markup for S. 1 a few weeks ago, I simply cannot understand why so many of my Democratic colleagues would like to hand over the control of our elections to the Federal Government.

To take one example, this bill would allow candidates for the Senate to receive Federal funding for their campaigns through a new program supported by Federal dollars. That would include a 6-to-1 match for contributions up to \$200, meaning that, if a donor gives \$100, Federal dollars coming from taxpayers would match that with \$600 more.

During the bill's markup, I offered an amendment to prevent sitting Members of the Senate from benefiting from this windfall, but it was rejected by all of my Democratic colleagues on the committee. This does not help voters make informed decisions. This only helps those of us who are already here in Congress. The changes S. 1 proposes only get more radical from there.

This bill would effectively turn the bipartisan six-member Federal Election Commission—the agency that oversees the financing of Federal elections—into a five-person panel subject to partisan control by giving the sitting President the power to appoint an independent fifth Commissioner to the agency. Because only a slim majority would then be needed to make a decision, this Commissioner could act as the deciding vote on issues that have historically been bipartisan.

If Senate Republicans were still in the majority and I told you that our leader wanted to pass a bill that would tip the balance of the FEC toward our party, those on the other side would object, and they would be right to do so. This Commission must remain truly bipartisan, and that is done by having equal Democratic and Republican membership.

S. 1 would also repeal an appropriations amendment that helps ensure the IRS does not infringe on the First Amendment rights of taxpayers who contribute to nonprofits. Allowing the IRS to possess this information when it is not a campaign finance enforcement agency only empowers bad actors at the agency to target groups that it dislikes. This is especially problematic given the recent leak of sensitive taxpayer information, and the IRS's history of targeting tax-exempt applicants solely based on their political leanings.

Also, this bill would not only allow people to register to vote at a polling place on election day without presenting any form of identification, it would tell the 36 States that have some form of voter ID laws on the books now that those laws would be illegal. This is despite the fact that a majority of Americans supports requiring photo ID

to vote, and it flies in the face of the practices of other democracies, like Germany, the United Kingdom, Norway, and France, which all require voters to verify their identities before casting their ballots.

Despite all of the revolutionary changes this bill proposes, the most disheartening thing might be that it was introduced to solve a problem that doesn't actually exist. More people voted in last year's elections than ever before, including a record 76 percent of voters in my State of Nebraska. In the middle of a pandemic, voters turned out in historic numbers to make their voices heard.

Defenders of this bill can't say that this turnout was an issue, so they have tried to scapegoat States like Georgia and Florida, which have recently passed new election laws. President Biden went as far as to call Georgia's bill "Jim Crow in the 21st century" before admitting that he was speaking about a very early draft, not the bill that actually became law.

Reality gets in the way of that narrative, too, as Georgia's bill is less restrictive than the laws of more liberal States like New York and Delaware. Reasonable people can disagree about the best way to conduct elections, but it is disingenuous to say that something is voter suppression or undemocratic just because you may not agree with it.

I hope we can agree that we all want to make sure that all American voters are able to make their voices heard in our elections. To see that in action, you only have to look at States like Nebraska. We have been a "no excuse" State for absentee and early voting for years, which means that anyone who has already provided an ID when registering to vote can vote by mail for any reason whatsoever. In fact, a bill that originally allowed for mail-in voting in Nebraska was the first bill I introduced and passed as a State legislator in 2005.

Many other States go out of their way to make it easy to vote, regardless of which party is in power and regardless of whether they are red States or blue States. That is the beauty of the American system. Each State can do as it sees fit and respond to events like the COVID-19 pandemic while still producing positive reforms. By keeping States free from Federal mandates, we are allowing them to innovate and introduce the changes that work best for them.

Washington, DC, isn't what makes America great. Our 50 States, each with its own history and its own needs, are what make this country so unique.

This bill jeopardizes that diversity, and it would do away with a system that works well and replace it with one that would be partisan, divisive, and, frankly, chaotic.

I think we would be making a terrible mistake if we pass S. 1 as it is currently written.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MARKEY). The majority leader.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 123.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Tommy P. Beaudreau, of Alaska, to be Deputy Secretary of the Interior.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 123, Tommy P. Beaudreau, of Alaska, to be Deputy Secretary of the Interior.

Charles E. Schumer, Jack Reed, Ben Ray Lujan, Michael F. Bennet, Jeanne Shaheen, Alex Padilla, Chris Van Hollen, Debbie Stabenow, Christopher A. Coons, Mark R. Warner, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Margaret Wood Hassan, Brian Schatz, Jacky Rosen, Tammy Baldwin, Mark Kelly, Benjamin L. Cardin, Jeff Merkley.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 157.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of John K. Tien, of Georgia, to be Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 157, John K. Tien, of Georgia, to be Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security.

Charles E. Schumer, Jack Reed, Ben Ray Lujan, Michael F. Bennet, Jeanne Shaheen, Alex Padilla, Chris Van Hollen, Debbie Stabenow, Christopher A. Coons, Mark R. Warner, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Margaret Wood Hassan, Brian Schatz, Tammy Baldwin, Mark Kelly, Benjamin L. Cardin, Jeff Merkley.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, finally, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum calls for the cloture motions filed today, June 15, be waived.

The PRESIDING OFFICER without objection, it is so ordered.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

JUNETEENTH NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE DAY ACT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Judiciary Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 475 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the bill by title. The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 475) to amend title 5, United States Code, to designate Juneteenth National Independence Day as a legal public holiday.

There being no objection, the committee was discharged, and the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill (S. 475) was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading, was read the third time, and passed, as follows:

S. 475

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Juneteenth National Independence Day Act".